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CIA employees lobby for some basic rights

By WILLARD EDWARDS

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)
WASHINGTON — Agents of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the nation's darkly mysterious spy network, have been prowling Capitol Hill, engaging in furtive conferences with senators and whispering to influential staff members.

Since the CIA is supposed to concern itself only with foreign espionage operations, such activity hinted at some sensational expose. Was a member of Congress, perhaps, in touch with a CIA agent? Had Communist agents penetrated a House or Senate committee?

An investigation permits disclosure of a more prosaic explanation. The CIA has been busy in the great American game of lobbying. It is exerting all its efforts to defeat legislation which would give its employees some basic constitutional rights.

Every spy story fan knows, of course, that a spy has no rights, constitutional or otherwise.

He serves under a warning that his country will disavow him if he is caught. He is a

slave to the bidding of a cold-eyed tyrannical chief, given some such code name as "M" or "K", who sends him out to kill or be killed while stealing secrets from the enemy. Only an occasional bout with some temptress lightens his lonely lot.

This fictional concept is not too far from reality. There is no question that secret agents must abandon the right to personal privacy. Government intelligence agencies compile detailed records on their employees, exploring their lives from the time of birth.

The customary justification for such prying is an understandable concern about penetration by enemy agents.

The same excuse cannot be made by other government agencies, but Congress found that "big brotherism" in the Johnson Administration included an insatiable curiosity about the most intimate details of the lives of all federal employees, now close to 3,000,000 in number.

Young women secretaries have been forced to reveal their sex experiences, before and after marriage, and are asked

what they dream about and whether they love their mothers. Men applicants for employment have been strapped into lie-detecting machines and similarly quizzed. The federal thirst for knowledge seemed to be concentrated on the sex habits and religious beliefs of workers of both sexes.

The Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, after a two-year study, voted unanimously to report a bill protecting government employees from unwarranted intrusion on their privacy.

Certain exemptions were granted the CIA in emergency cases affecting national security, but the agency was obviously not satisfied and began lobbying for a blanket exemption.

Sponsored by more than 50 senators, the bill was brought up in the Senate last week for certain approval. Suddenly, Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), the majority leader, postponed its consideration until Sept. 19. He admitted that the CIA had made a last-minute request for the delay.

In his 24 years in Congress,

he had never heard of such a demand from a federal agency, he said, but he had granted it to give the agency more time to outline its objections.

Sen. Sam J. Ervin (D-N.C.), the bill's author, raged that the CIA had refused for two years to make public its objections. He said it only wanted "the unmitigated right to kick its employees around."

Ervin noted the testimony of a witness who had told his experiences in seeking employment as a CIA agent. He said that when he protested a series of "humiliating" questions during a lie test, the deputy chief in charge "gave me a wise smile, leaned forward, and said 'would you prefer that we used the thumb screws?'"

James Bond's "M" could not have phrased the official attitude more eloquently.

The Senate may pass the bill eventually, thereby protecting the great majority of government employees from prying personal questions. But American spies, it is suggested, will never be given what Ervin called "the dignity and freedom which all other Americans enjoy."

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